

to strike were over. Jesus went out one day from his Nazareth home to begin a new epoch in his life. The world had been preparing, now it was prepared. He had been preparing by silent thought and study. Now he must finish that preparation. He heard the call of John. One day he appears on the banks of Jordan among the multitudes who there hang trembling on the Baptist's words. He presses his way thru the crowd. And lo! as he presents himself before that stern prophet who with unblanched face and unhesitating voice had called proud Pharisee and careless Sadducee to repentance, the prophet falters, pales and stops in the midst of his passionate appeal. His eye is upon that calm, thoughtful, majestic face coming thru the throng. And as Jesus offers himself for baptism John stops him with, "I have need to be baptized of thee and comest thou to me?" We know not whether Jesus and John were acquainted or not. They probably were. Tho the Baptist knew not that he was the Messiah until now. John, the author of the gospel, tells us that the Baptist said, "I knew him not." But that may simply imply that he knew Christ not as the Savior. But whether acquainted or not, something in Jesus' appearance made John the Baptist feel that here was a man far above himself. But Jesus with true nobility and true humility said, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." And yet some people will read that and say that Christian baptism is unnecessary! How unlike Christ! They two went down into the water, John baptized him, and as they came out, Jesus praying as he came, a marvel occurred. The Holy Spirit in the form of a dove was seen by John and Jesus at least, to descend from the rended heavens and alight upon Jesus. And John knew, from the sign given him of God when he was sent, that this was the promised Messiah. (See John, first chapter.) For the Baptist it was the climax of his career. It was the beginning of his end. A voice from heaven declared of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The light of the Baptist began to wane. The Sun of Righteousness had risen. And the Baptist was glad.

#### The Temptation

The remainder of our lesson is taken up with a narrative of one of the strange things in the life of Jesus, the temptation. No teaching of the Bible is plainer than that Jesus was really tempted. Yet it seems strange that Jesus, the Son of God, could be tempted with evil. Yet such was the case. He was Son of man as well as Son of God. And the mystery of that, who can make clear? And it was that same Spirit which lighted upon him at baptism and abode there which led him into the wilderness to be tempted. The wilderness was that stretch of hills and rocks lying west and northwest of the Dead Sea and along the Jordan. In it John the Baptist had spent many years of silent preparation.

Here somewhere Jesus now went. He had just come from the waters of baptism. All the holy joy of submission to God, all spiritual exaltation of the consciousness of a mission in the world was his. His soul was so wrought up with high thought, spiritual ecstasy, and great plans that he forgot even to eat for forty days. Weakness began to creep over him, both physical and mental. And Jesus had the experience which in a lesser day is experienced by every preacher after a revival effort, when, his physical strength exhausted, his mental powers relaxed and the spiritual nature not wrought up so high as formerly, the devil comes and tempts his personal Christianity, and fills him with the most harrowing doubts.

Then was satan's hour. He came to Jesus and said, "Yes, you are the Son of God! Why then do you starve when by your divine power you could by a word turn these stones to barley cakes?" It was a temptation to use his power as the Son of God for himself. Jesus replied, "God, my Father, has kept me thus long. He can and will keep me longer" from death by starvation. It was a temptation to doubt God's keeping power. Jesus answered with a passage of Scripture, "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Memory and imagination would be most active when Jesus had become so weak. And it is easy to see how this would tempt him. With desolateness all about him, desolateness within would be suggested by his own weak body and the temptation to exercise his power for himself would be real and trying. Jesus had stood the test here. Even under failing strength of mind and body, even surrounded by the dreariness of the desolate region, even when he knew that he had power to work a miracle to feed his famishing body, he refused to prove his power by an act of distrust in God, to use his divine power for selfish ends, to prove his divine power by sight rather than to simply believe it by faith.

#### Second Temptation

Then came the tempter with another form of trial.

If Jesus would trust God rather than prove his faith by an act of unbelief, he should have an opportunity to trust God in real danger. Satan took Jesus, either literally or perhaps in thought, to the high porch of the temple at Jerusalem. On this high porch or pinnacle a priest each morning watched for the first beams of the sun to appear over the top of Olivet, when by a silver trumpet he gave the signal for the morning worship to begin. Perhaps, Jesus was here just after the priest had blown his trumpet and descended. The court below would be full of waiting worshippers. And the Jews had a common belief that from this pinnacle the Messiah would descend with a shout to lead Israel to victory. "Now," said satan, "why not take this short cut to your Messiahship? God has promised in the 91st Psalm to hold

you up by angel hands, lest you should dash your foot against a stone. Now trust God. Cast yourself down before the assembled people and they will receive you as their Messiah." It was an insidious temptation. Jesus' soul was burning with a great love to save the people of Israel from their sins. How could he do it unless they should receive him as their Messiah? Why not take the short cut to this end? Why not appeal to their wonder, rather than take the slow way of the transformation of the mind and heart? Ah, there was the trial. But Jesus, silenced the tempter again by a text, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." In other words, "To wantonly cast myself down from this dizzy height for the purpose of creating wonder and meeting the false expectations of a superstitious people would be to tempt God. It would be to take another method than God's to the Messiahship. There can be no salvation thru superstition it must come thru the cross."

#### Third Temptation

Once more he was to be tried. Either literally or in thought, "the devil taketh him unto an exceeding high mountain and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." We know not what mountain it was. Nor, are we to suppose that it is meant that he was upon one where he could see all kingdoms of the world. But in his mind's eye he could behold them, to the east the rich plains of Babylonia and India, to the south Arabia with its teeming millions where a few centuries later Mohammed began a new religion, to the west the great kingdoms of Egypt, Carthage, and of Rome. To the north sunny Greece and the wild borders of Scythia. O how Jesus would love to be the leader of all these people. And such he was to be, but not in satan's way. These temptations were of methods. God's methods are not satan's. Satan said, "Bow to me. Use my method of force and worldly glory rather than the real forces of the spiritual nature. Appeal to men's love of worldly glory rather than the moral glory of righteousness of all the glory of these kingdoms shall be yours. Put yourself at the head of the Jews. Raise revolt against Rome. Grasp the sword. You are the great Messiah. God will fight for you. You can use your divine power to overthrow your enemies and you can sit on the throne of the world." "No," said Jesus, "I'll do right first. I'll not do wrong even that good may come. I'll trust God. I'll take his slower, less showy, less easy, but more sure, more blessed and only right way, the way of patient suffering. Get thee hence, satan; for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. That I must obey, whether my glory come soon or late, whether it bring me ease or pain." The battle was fought. The victory won. The tempter fled back to his dark abode. God's angels came and with hands of light ministered un-